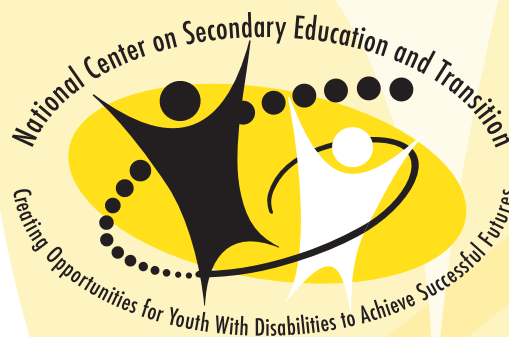


# ESSENTIAL TOOLS

**In Their Own Words:  
Employer  
Perspectives  
on Youth with  
Disabilities  
in the Workplace**



The College of Education  
& Human Development

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



U.S. Office of Special  
Education Programs



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Disabilities  
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*March 2004*

*Richard Luecking, Editor  
TransCen, Inc.*

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NCSET was established to *create opportunities for youth with disabilities to achieve successful futures*. Headquartered at the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, NCSET provides technical assistance and disseminates information focused on four major areas of national significance for youth with disabilities and their families:

- Providing students with disabilities with improved access and success in the secondary education curriculum.
- Ensuring that students achieve positive postschool results in accessing postsecondary education, meaningful employment, independent living, and participation in all aspects of community life.
- Supporting student and family participation in educational and postschool decision-making and planning.
- Improving collaboration and system linkages at all levels through the development of broad-based partnerships and networks at the national, state, and local levels.

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— Richard Luecking, Editor



## **INTRODUCTION**

Work experience for youth with disabilities is one of the most critical factors that sets the stage for their postsecondary employment success. Research and practice show that youth benefit from frequent and continuous exposure to real work environments throughout the secondary school years and beyond. These experiences, however, occur only when employers are available, willing, and prepared.

Indeed, employers have operational and economic stakes in the success of programs that connect them with youth with disabilities. Employers must consider both the costs and the benefits associated with having youth with disabilities in their workplaces. Thus, it is essential for educators, transition specialists, workforce development professionals, family members, and youth to understand employers' needs, circumstances, and perspectives as they establish work experiences.

This publication features the experiences of employers in their own words. Employers write about how they became involved in providing work experiences for youth with disabilities, what made it work, and what they recommend to individuals and organizations representing youth. These perspectives can provide guidance to those with an interest in ensuring that youth with disabilities obtain access to a range of work-based experiences.

### **The Authors and their Assignments**

The authors were recruited from a sample of employers who could speak about efforts to successfully include youth with diverse disabilities in the workplace. Employers were identified through a national search, and nominations were solicited from programs and colleagues who had such contacts.

The employer authors were selected for three reasons. First, they were all satisfied with the experience of having youth with disabilities in their workplaces. Second, they represented a diverse range of industries, geographical locations, sizes, and private- and public-sector entities. Finally, they provided a variety of work-based experiences that included job shadowing, mentoring, volunteering, internships, apprenticeships, and paid employment.

Each author was asked to develop a brief essay based on the answers to these questions:

1. What is the nature of your company's/organization's business?
2. How did you get involved in bringing youth with disabilities into your workplace?
3. Who were your partners?
4. What were your challenges?
5. What made it work?
6. What advice from your experience would you give other employers and programs that serve youth with disabilities?

Written in first-person narratives, the essays represent the voices of employers who have direct experience with these issues. The perspectives are uniquely their own.

Despite their diverse representation (See Table 1), the employers share a surprising number of commonalities that tell us much about what is important to them, what it takes to get them involved with youth who have disabilities, and what it takes to keep them involved. While many of these commonalities will be apparent to readers as they ponder the employers' perspectives, we include a brief summary and conclusion at the end of the publication to highlight their common ideas on how to best make these work experiences successful for both employers and youth.

It is the intention of this publication to help practitioners, advocates, and policy makers in the fields of education and workforce development better understand what employers want and need. In so doing it is hoped that these perspectives will suggest how education and workforce development systems can improve their partnerships with the business community so more employers will see the value these experiences offer. Ultimately, the result will be that more youth will successfully experience learning in the workplace, which is so vital to their eventual adult employment success.

*Table 1. Variables Represented by Contributing Authors*

<b>Company</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Experiences Offered</b>
Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center	Healthcare	Midwest	Career exploration, volunteer experiences, paid work
American Institute on Cancer Research	Research	Mid-Atlantic	Internships, paid work
Generac Portable Products	Manufacturing	Midwest	Apprenticeships, paid work
Kemtah Group, Inc.	Information technology	Southwest	Job shadowing, internships, paid work
Kennedy Space Center, NASA	Aerospace technology	Southeast	Job shadowing, career exploration, internships
MacWorld magazine	Publishing	West Coast	Paid work
Microsoft	Computer software and technology	Northwest	Job shadowing, career exploration, volunteer experiences, internships, paid work
Medtronic Physio-Control	Manufacturing	Northwest	Paid work
Port Discovery	Entertainment	Mid-Atlantic	Volunteer experiences, internships
Safeway	Retail	West Coast	Internships, paid work
Old Colony Insurance	Finance	South	Paid work



## **Publish or Perish: Macworld Magazine**

*by Shelly Ginenthal*

When I first met Wynton\* it was hard for me to imagine him doing any of our company's clerical tasks. He had almost no work experience. More disconcerting to me, however, was that he had no discernable speech, although later he used a communication board. I didn't know how we would be able to communicate with him. His mobility was also difficult as he used a wheelchair, and he had trouble controlling his arm movements. I was not sure how those issues would affect his work.

Whenever we brought young workers into our workplace, they were expected to meet several key criteria regardless of their circumstances. First, they had to meet productivity standards—the same as any other employee. Next, they had to perform tasks that added value to the operation. That is, by virtue of their work, other more experienced workers were freed up to perform more demanding and critical tasks. At the very least, they had to be youth who were going to make our work life easier, not harder. Youth with poor social and interpersonal skills, work habits, or attendance were not likely to last long with us.

However, in our fast-paced office where our main business required meeting strict publication deadlines for our San Francisco-based magazine, *Macworld*, we needed more data entry help. So when I was approached about Wynton by a local transition program called WorkLink, I was leery but open to listening to what the program and Wynton might have to offer.

### **Why the Pitch Worked**

I was aware of programs that served people with disabilities, but had no direct experience with them before I was contacted by WorkLink. If WorkLink had approached me by appealing to my sense of charity or by petitioning me to give people with disabilities a chance, I doubt that I would have listened. However, the WorkLink representative, Sara Murphy, clearly expressed interest in the issues of our business. The initial contact was characterized by questions about our magazine and the human resources needs that it had. It was evident that WorkLink wanted the relationship to work for our operation. In fact, they guaranteed that they would be with us every step of the way if we agreed to employ a young person represented by WorkLink.

Ms. Murphy came to our office and observed how we operated, how we got our work done, and what areas of the operation really needed help. She proposed Wynton, who was interested in information technology, as someone who could help us in our circulation and human resources departments. She was clearly interested in making sure that we obtained “real” work output as a result of our involvement in the program. She was not looking to “make work” for Wynton. In the end, it was Ms. Murphy's sincerity and genuine interest in our enterprise that convinced us to give it a try, in spite of my initial reservations about Wynton's circumstances.

### **Making it Work for Everyone**

There were two areas of our operation where we needed considerable assistance. One was our circulation department, where there was a pressing need to update our database on newsstand locations around the country that sold our magazine. An updated database would make marketing and billing more current, productive, and accurate. One of Wynton's main tasks was to enter the necessary data into the database. Eventually, he helped us update the entire database.

The second area of need existed across departments. We needed someone to put obsolete documents through a shredder. At the time, editors and highly paid support staff often performed this task when their time could be more productively and profitably spent doing higher priority tasks. Wynton was soon performing this task whenever he caught up with data entry. Later, a third area of responsibility was added to Wynton's position in the human resources department: delivering faxes and other communiqués throughout the building and sending out routine responses to job applicants. Each of these activities made a positive, measurable difference in the work completed within the departments.

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\* “Wynton” is a pseudonym for a young man who worked at our company for several years.

WorkLink was key to the success all along the way: key to getting started with the arrangement; key to organizing and helping with Wynton's training; key to making sure the work got done; key to ensuring the necessary quality was achieved; and, of course, key to helping us learn to communicate and interact with Wynton. Ms. Murphy held a brown-bag lunch training for all department staff on general disability awareness as well as on specific tips about effectively interacting with Wynton.

There was another unpredictable and somewhat intangible benefit to our involvement with WorkLink. After Wynton had been with us for a while, he became a part of our office's cultural fabric. In addition to his contributions to our operations, we came to understand and value the diversity he brought to our office. He had a distinct positive effect on office morale, just like any other young, energetic, and likeable employee who might join our team.

### **Problems Identified, Problems Solved**

Wynton's contributions to *Macworld's* operation did not come without some early challenges in terms of meeting productivity requirements, communication, interpersonal behavior, and personal hygiene. He had to learn data entry input procedures. Ms. Murphy spent a great deal of time with us and with Wynton as he learned how to correctly enter the data. It was Sara's persistence and presence that enabled Wynton to eventually learn his duties thoroughly.

When personal hygiene problems initially occurred, WorkLink helped us solve the problem by working with Wynton. When we had trouble with Wynton's speech, we were taught how to understand and communicate with him. Eventually many of us became quite capable of communicating with Wynton. And finally, when mistakes occurred in data entry, WorkLink made sure the work task was set up to accommodate Wynton's disability and that training was better targeted to his skill level. With that intensive assistance, Wynton was soon more than pulling his weight.

Employers like *Macworld* occasionally hire someone who initially has trouble on the job. Often such circumstances result in termination for the employee and a lot of effort on our part making up for lost time. Unlike these kinds of circumstances, our experience with WorkLink made it possible to not only correct early performance errors, but also to continually identify how our work flow and work load could be improved.

### **Lessons for Other Programs**

The success of our experience with Wynton and WorkLink taught us several lessons that other companies might learn from. Among these are the benefits from working with a competent partner like WorkLink to find new sources of labor. Also, there are lessons that I can pass on to organizations that provide similar services to WorkLink. My chief recommendations to other programs that represent youth with disabilities are:

- Identify and then address real business needs; that is, identify what you can do for the businesses;
- Make sure youth are doing "real" work;
- Guarantee to help work through any issue that the youth's presence might create; and
- Don't approach employers with a charitable appeal. In the end what we need are people who can do the job.

Like any other service or business partner, we are more apt to work with people who take the time and interest to learn what we do and how we do it. Approach us by saying, "Here's what we can do for you." Nothing works better than someone telling me how they are going to help me, promising a commitment, and then following through on that promise. Knowing that we have helped send someone on the way to being a productive worker is a good feeling. But the feeling only lasts as long as that worker is performing satisfactorily.

*Shelly Ginenthal, the former Vice President for Human Resources with Macworld magazine, was integrally involved in organizing a work-based internship for a youth with a disability who required significant supports and accommodation at that company.*

## **Reaching Out to Youth: Microsoft Corporation**

*by Mylene Padolina*

Microsoft strives to enable people and businesses worldwide to realize their full potential by empowering people through great software—any time, any place, and on any device.

### **Commitment to Diversity**

We have a corporate commitment to the principle of diversity. In that spirit, we believe that diversity enriches our products, empowers us to provide excellent customer service, enhances the lives of our employees, and connects us to all communities in which we live and work. We consider employees to be our greatest asset. We make every effort to provide flexible programs, resources, and tools to help our employees create their own balance in life. We believe that our continued success is dependent on the diverse skills, experiences, and backgrounds that our employees bring to the table.

An excellent source of disability empowerment and support at Microsoft is the employee resource groups that are initiated and chartered by employees. These self-organized groups support networking, continuing education, career development, mentoring, social activities, and community outreach. Some of the disability-focused employee resource groups include the Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) group, Visually Impaired Persons in MS (MSVIP), and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing group.

Microsoft's diversity education program seeks to maximize the performance of every employee and to enhance Microsoft's ability to attract, develop, and keep the best and brightest talent. This program is designed to reinforce the company's commitment to diversity while ensuring that employees have the awareness, skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to succeed. Our employees are responsible for their own career development, so we provide them with all the tools and resources they need to grow professionally. Microsoft's technical education youth programs, online self-paced training, and management development training all promote learning. We communicate the importance of a respectful work environment in maximizing the performance of every employee and enhancing the company's ability to attract, develop, and retain the best and brightest talent. The emphasis on understanding, valuing, and leveraging differences is also linked to our ability to compete effectively in an ever-changing marketplace.

One of our main goals at Microsoft is to have a positive impact on the number of under-represented minorities, women, and individuals with disabilities in the technology industry and those hired by the company.

### **Microsoft Reaches Out to Youth with Disabilities**

Microsoft has a history of implementing youth outreach programs. Our philosophy is to excite kids about technical careers at a young age. We want to show them that their career choices are not limited and that there are lots of jobs they can do. Our goal is to bridge digital divide issues along with creating a pipeline of future candidates for employment. For 10 years, Microsoft Corporate Diversity Group has been providing work experiences for youth, but we found that we had limited participation from students with disabilities. Microsoft has many successful and productive full-time employees who have disabilities and felt confident that youth with disabilities could participate, benefit, and contribute in a worthwhile manner. We want to help them to feel empowered about their future in order to counteract long-standing lowered expectations.

Beginning in 2000, we began to specifically target youth with disabilities for participation in workforce development opportunities at Microsoft through our involvement in a number of business/education partnerships. These partnerships include:

- Working with local special education teachers to arrange job shadow and career days and to make appropriate matches between students and opportunities;
- Partnering with local and national organizations and the government to help design and market programs, events, and participate in committees; and

- Collaborating with community organizations to conduct disability awareness and sensitivity training for employees.

As the coordinating entity, Microsoft's Corporate Diversity Group acts as a liaison between the students, community organizations, school groups, and the employee volunteer participants. We continually seek feedback from our partners, employees, and youth participants on how we are doing in the programs and events we offer. We ask participants about likes, dislikes, and ideas for improvement. Our goal is to ensure a meaningful experience for all involved.

### **Workforce Exposure at Microsoft**

Youth with disabilities participate in a number of different workforce development opportunities. These include: internships, job shadowing, career days, youth service days, corporate campus visits, leadership conferences, and a one-day technology camp. At the camp, youth meet with a panel of employees with disabilities who share their experiences at Microsoft, and they also have the opportunity to preview technology that may be helpful to them in the workplace.

Microsoft makes it possible for both high school and college students with disabilities to participate in a variety of work experiences. High school student internships are intended to excite students' interest in a technical field and to encourage them to pursue the education necessary to excel in this field. College internships are set up to translate into full-time jobs.

Sixty percent of the positions at Microsoft are highly technical. Youth involved in work experiences at Microsoft are placed in a number of different technical areas, including testing software in the game division, Web site development, and software development. All internships are technical in nature.

### **Employee Preparation and Involvement with Students**

Microsoft employees are extremely involved with student workers. We take time to match students' skills and interests with employees' skills and interests. We hold introductory meetings for our employees to better prepare them for conducting job shadow experiences, mentoring, and interacting effectively with students with disabilities. Microsoft works with employees to ensure that students will understand the job.

Depending on the type of work opportunity (such as job shadowing, career day, etc.), employees participate in different activities prior to the students' arrival on the job. Employees who volunteer to provide job shadow experiences complete a form describing themselves and their experience working with youth with disabilities. Microsoft then works with the school or a local program called "DO-IT," sponsored by the University of Washington, to match employers and students. Employees receive disability etiquette training and support in planning their day with students. DO-IT staff help organize and conduct the training. There are also various media available about working with and accommodating people with disabilities in the workplace, such as online videos that describe disability etiquette.

Before a young person begins a job, the work group where they will be placed is prepared for their arrival. For example, before a student intern who is deaf arrived on the job, his work group took sign language classes. Both the intern and his co-workers were thrilled to be able to communicate effectively with each other. The student's disability was demystified for his co-workers, and many of the employees continued sign language classes after the student completed his internship.

Microsoft also facilitates dialogues between the interns and their work group. These discussions allow employees to ask the person with a disability any questions, such as how best to communicate job tasks or how they can make the work environment more accessible. For example, for an intern with impaired vision, a trainer, who is blind and from a community partner agency, facilitated an introductory icebreaker session. The training session allowed the intern and work group to identify strategies for a successful work experience.

### **We Strive to Make Diversity Our Success**

One of the company's many goals is to increase diversity. Our business-education partnerships that target youth with disabilities bring us closer to reaching this goal. By bringing youth with disabilities to Microsoft for work-

force development opportunities, we hope to spark their interest in our company and understanding of the technology field. This can be a win-win situation for the students and for Microsoft. Collaboration with local, state, and national organizations has helped to make this workforce development initiative a success. Through concerted efforts in the past three years, we have reached out to more than 500 students with disabilities.

It is difficult, however, to determine the exact number of students with disabilities, both at the high school and college levels, who have actually had employment opportunities at Microsoft. Because we have a voluntary self-identification process, some students may choose not to be identified as having a disability. For a more accurate picture, we need to continue to create a workplace where employees can feel comfortable about disclosing their disability. We anticipate continued expansion of these opportunities, as our business will continue to need more technically skilled workers.

*Mylene Padolina is a Senior Diversity Consultant with the Microsoft Corporate Diversity Group of Microsoft Corporation, where she is responsible for disability integration and youth outreach programs. She also assists with new hires, secures appropriate accommodations, and designs and coordinates training events for the corporation.*

### **Boosting the High Tech Workforce: Kennedy Space Center, NASA**

*by Cassandra Black*

The John F. Kennedy Space Center (KSC) is the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) center of excellence for launch and payload processing systems. KSC is in charge of space launch operations and spaceport and range technologies. Part of this responsibility includes the checkout, launch, and landing of the space shuttle and its payloads. KSC is located at the Cape Canaveral Spaceport in Florida.

#### **High Tech Exposure for Students with Disabilities**

We have been providing internships since 1985, but became involved in the High School High Tech (HSHT) Program in 1995 to provide internships for high school students with disabilities. The goals of the HSHT program are to motivate students' interests in high-tech careers and to assist students with disabilities to become independent, productive members of the workforce of the 21st century.

KSC's HSHT program works in partnership with the Space Coast Center for Independent Living (the local program administrator) and Able Trust (the statewide program administrator in Florida). SCCIL is a community-based student, parent, and employer program designed to encourage students with physical, sensory, or learning disabilities to pursue their interests in science, engineering, and technology. Applicants apply directly to SCCIL, which recruits students from local schools as early as seventh grade. Students are eligible to participate in a six-week internship at KSC when they reach age 16. SCCIL collaborates with NASA to screen applications, help with placement, and assist with transportation, accommodations, etc. SCCIL conducts a variety of skill-building workshops for students, including interviewing skills and computer training. Students also write a final report as a culminating activity of their internship.

As program manager of HSHT, I work with managers and supervisors to provide internships at KSC and to determine the schedule of summer activities such as tours and presentations. I also participate in many of the SCCIL activities for students. I try to have a presence at these activities so that I can get to know the students and their families, become familiar with the students' skills and interests, and provide information about the KSC HSHT program as well as its skills and technology needs.

The annual cycle for the KSC HSHT program is:

- Fall-Spring: Establish KSC requirements, market the project in the community and receive and evaluate applications;
- Spring: Interviews, workshops, and activities; and
- Summer: Six-week internships at KSC, which include matches with KSC mentors.

#### **Strategies for a Good Work Experience**

The job match is very important. I work with the SCCIL program manager to identify students' interests and skills, and then I match students with KSC personnel based on the students' interests, the circumstances of the particular work sites to which they might be assigned, and the qualities of potential KSC mentors. Students are introduced to their KSC mentors on their first day on the job and are given clear expectations for their internship. For their part, the mentors have been very pleased with their student workers as a result of the careful matching.

By attending student activities at the SCCIL, I have visibility with the students and their parents and become familiar with the students' interests, skills, and needs. At times we are able to meet the students' parents at the SCCIL activities. This is the first work experience for many of the students, and the parents have questions and concerns that I try to address. This process is a full-circle community partnership. I try to have an open-door policy for easy access and communication with students, mentors, agency support staff, and parents to share any concerns they might have at any time.

## **Our Lessons Learned**

In the past, KSC interns have been primarily college students. The employer mentors were initially concerned about whether high school students and students with disabilities would be able to do the work. I needed to meet with prospective mentors to provide some disability awareness training. I told the mentors that the students might have disabilities, but that they all had individual abilities and interests.

We have found that the students have been very creative in finding solutions to tasks. Identifying student support needs as soon as possible is necessary to make the work experience positive from the start. At times the students want so badly to demonstrate that they can do the job independently that they are reluctant to ask for additional help or support. I now speak with the SCCIL program administrator to identify accommodations and with KSC staff to clarify what is needed before the student comes to NASA.

NASA also has a center-wide Disability Awareness Action Working Group. By representing my program in this group, I become familiar with the center-wide perspective on effective measures to work with people with disabilities.

For an outside agency to successfully support a student work experience, it is important for the agency to do its homework. To create an effective job match, the agency needs to be familiar with both job requirements and the students' skills, support needs, and interests in specific career fields. The agency should understand the availability and types of jobs in a company and anticipate future company trends. In this way, the agency can be well informed and most supportive in helping both the company and the student to have a positive work experience.

The support services that SSCIL provides include:

- Recruiting, prescreening, and referring students from local high schools;
- Helping with the job match process, which is a team effort between the KSC HSHT and SCCIL programs;
- Providing job support through site visits as needed; and
- Providing NASA with center-wide interpreter services for interns and employees who are deaf.

## **A Success for Everyone**

One student with limited mobility and speech blossomed in the program. Her parents noted that prior to her internship, she was often very quiet and did not participate in activities because her speech was so difficult to understand. In addition, her family had been very concerned and protective about her visiting different places.

She interned in the astronaut crew quarters, which has a strict security protocol, so we had to address the staff's concerns. We worked out the security issues, and with the help of SSCIL, we were able to address those concerns. Once those issues and her accommodation needs were addressed, she had a successful internship in database management, creating databases and spreadsheets.

The staff was very pleased with her work ethic, and her family was amazed and pleased with her increased independence, self-care skills, and heightened self-esteem. Despite her parents' concerns, she later participated in a statewide Youth Leadership Forum for Individuals with Disabilities that required her to be away from home. Before her internship, she or her family would not even have considered this type of activity. She became a "star" of the program and served as a peer leader the next year. She is now finishing her second year of community college and will soon be enrolling in a four-year university. She is also planning to be married. This young woman had a positive work experience at KSC, and it also enabled her to excel in other situations. Now she will pursue the higher education necessary for a career in a high-tech field.

A total of 56 students from the program have interned at KSC. Some 95% have enrolled in postsecondary education. It is clear that they have benefited from the experience. NASA's KSC also benefits from this type of partnership by having quality interns who can do the job, by receiving the support we need to make it work, and by giving our future workforce a boost.

*Cassandra Black is the Program Manager for NASA's High School High Tech Program at Kennedy Space Center in Florida.*

### **Finding Premium Volunteers: Port Discovery**

*by Leah Burke*

Every good museum depends on a cadre of committed and well-trained volunteers. As a nonprofit publicly supported operation that employs a committed but modest staff, Port Discovery is no different. While we call it a “kid-powered” museum because of the museum’s many interactive experiences for children, it might also be called a “volunteer-powered” museum. To maintain the interactive nature of our exhibits and programs, we need a host of volunteers to provide young visitors and program participants with all the assistance they need to get the most out of our museum. Port Discovery is in the heart of the Baltimore’s Inner Harbor, amid a constant stream of visitors.

Port Discovery has several volunteer programs that pertain to youth and young adults that are housed in several different departments including Exhibits and Programs, Education, Sales and Marketing, Development, Facilities, Retail, and Visitor Services. These include:

- A regular volunteer program for which volunteers commit to a regular weekly or bi-weekly four-hour shift. Regular volunteers can be assigned to any aspect of the museum operation and must be more than 18 years old.
- A service-learning program that offers local students the opportunity to earn service-learning credits while exploring a variety of museum positions. Through these assignments, students age 14 and older are engaged in the learning process through hands-on work with museum staff.
- Internships that offer college students a variety of ways to earn college credits while they gain hands-on experience in program design, program development, and project administration.

All student volunteers participate in a well-defined and rigorous screening, orientation, supervision, and evaluation process. Students who have disabilities participate in the same process as other young people. They may require some accommodations or carefully structured experiences, but the expectations for participation and performance are no different than those for any volunteer.

### **Bringing in School Partners**

Volunteers are expected, at a minimum, to work four-hour shifts. They can work as many days as they want, but a minimum of two days a week is desired. Schedules are flexible, but given the demands on students’ time, it is important for us to set this expectation so we can count on them. Not all students can commit to this level of participation. Therefore, recruiting for volunteers is constant as we can never have too many. We have recruited throughout the Baltimore school system for our volunteer program. These schools have had both regular and special education programs. Currently, we have 53 high school volunteers, 20 of whom have disabilities.

We have worked closely with the Baltimore Transition Connection (BTC), which prepares students, many of whom require considerable assistance and support because of various disabilities, for the transition from school into the workplace. BTC’s staff has been especially responsive to our needs and has been a critical link between what we do and what the students are doing in their educational curricula. With the students, BTC often attends the entire orientation, which can last a whole day, in addition to coaching the students in their volunteer tasks. There are some students who need fairly intensive assistance with such things as feeding and medications, but we are open to whatever supports are needed to facilitate the participation of the volunteers as long as there is someone to help us make them available.

### **Meeting the Challenges**

Initially, some staff members expressed discomfort when meeting with students from BTC. We address these concerns and students’ needs in internal staff meetings and in briefings by BTC representatives. Employees are encouraged to assist students when necessary and to act as mentors to incorporate students with disabilities in museum activities and to reinforce museum policies. The museum staff has been uniformly accepting of these students. Since we work with a variety of volunteers, it was fairly easy for employees to get comfortable working with BTC students.



Many young volunteers are inexperienced in proper workplace behavior. Often they are not familiar with such basic expectations as attendance, punctuality, responding to supervision or co-workers, or showing interest in the work. Often interpersonal behavior, such as looking at someone when speaking, has to be taught through role-playing.

In essence, the challenges with BTC students are no different than those presented by other young volunteers. We want them to meet time commitments, follow conduct requirements, adhere to dress codes, and respond to supervision. We count on BTC staff to follow through with the students when problems arise.

Overall, our philosophy is to treat volunteers with disabilities with the same set of expectations as other volunteers. However, sometimes it is easy to forget that they have some limitations in skill and experience. The result is that we may occasionally assign them to an area that requires skills they do not yet possess. When that happens, we will move them to another area or position to find the right match. Again, we count on BTC representatives to help us work through some of these assignment issues.

### **Evidence of Success**

As with many of our nondisabled volunteers, students represented by BTC often come to us lacking interpersonal confidence. It is satisfying to see formerly introverted volunteers interacting effectively and appropriately with staff and children using the museum. For example, I observed one volunteer helping several young visitors use an interactive computer monitor. It was evident that the children were enjoying the experience and that the volunteer was feeling very competent in her role as a museum representative. This personal growth will serve the students well as they complete school and enter the workforce. In the meantime, it helps our museum serve the public as it is chartered to do. And of course, this arrangement helps strengthen our commitment to be truly kid-powered.

While we are careful to implement individual accommodations, like extra coaching from BTC staff, we have been insistent that BTC students meet the same expectations as other student volunteers. Some students who do a good job fulfilling their volunteer experiences will have the opportunity to move into paid positions at Port Discovery. In essence, the volunteer program helps students in their employment pursuits and helps us identify future employees.

We are pleased to have a significant percentage of our student volunteers coming from special education programs. We are looking forward to a long partnership with the schools and especially programs like BTC. As long as we get help in making the necessary accommodations and identifying meaningful assignments that work for both students and the museum, we will continue to make these youth a part of our volunteer program. The help of BTC and other school systems representatives makes it work.

*Leah Burke is the Volunteer Coordinator at Port Discovery. Among her primary responsibilities are managing youth who are fulfilling service-learning or intern credits while committing to a rigorous volunteer experience at the museum.*

### **Investigating Human Resource Options: American Institute for Cancer Research**

*by John McIlveen*

The American Institute for Cancer Research is an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to research and education that expands understanding and awareness of the relationship between diet and cancer. It receives no federal funds, nor has it received large-scale funding from any corporate or industry interest. Consequently, the institute relies on public support for its funding. It employs more than 100 people, including medical researchers, fundraising staff, media specialists, and various support staff.

One of the institute's major responsibilities to the community is the dissemination of information and research materials regarding cancer prevention. We also handle a large volume of inquiries concerning our research and regularly process donations and fundraising inquiries. The institute's Fulfillment Center processes up to 600 mailings a day (most are publication inserts). Mail processing is an often tedious but integral part of our operation. Since an ongoing concern is staff turnover in that department, we were eager to listen to representatives from a local special education transition program when they contacted us about hiring students they represented.

When hired in the human resources department, I was given a brochure from a program called *Bridges...From School to Work* which represented youth with disabilities. It was presented as a potential resource for recruiting, especially for entry-level positions. I was open to considering young people with disabilities because of prior experience in other companies. I also believed that being involved with the program would be a way for the institute to do something positive for the community as we found individuals who could fill our positions. We eventually brought in two high school students represented by Bridges to work in our Fulfillment Center.

#### **Challenges to Making it Work**

Many of the challenges to the initial success involved integrating the students into the workplace. Most staff had never worked with individuals with disabilities, and they had to learn how to interact with them and how to provide guidance and instruction. The Bridges staff assisted with this activity in the beginning, but since they did not interact daily with the students, the challenge was often in making the shift from Bridges staff support to co-worker support. Our employees often found themselves having to assist the students in basic tasks, from learning their jobs to navigating around the offices.

In addition, employees often had preconceived notions about what the students could or could not do. These concerns were usually related to perceptions about the students' ability to keep up with the work so that they would not interrupt the work flow. Because of this initial skepticism, there was a level of acceptance that had to occur among the staff. Consequently, it was a challenge to balance finding appropriate duties that would challenge the students yet not overwhelm them. Ultimately, achieving this balance was what convinced the staff to have the students in our workplace.

#### **Strategies that Made the Relationship Work**

The main reason the students are successful in our workplace is the assistance of the Bridges staff. They provide initial information and guidance about particular students as well as initial assistance in getting the students situated. They work with us to assess the job requirements and the students' skill level so that a good match can be made, resulting in tasks at which the students can excel.

A strategy we found effective was to bring the students in on a trial basis. Not only did this give the students time to become acclimated to their new jobs, but it also enabled the other employees to accept their presence. In fact, we made sure that the other employees were involved in decision-making related to student assignments and that their views were considered in evaluating the effectiveness of the matches of the students to their tasks.

Finally, because Bridges staff are available to the students *and* the employer, there is help to mitigate some of the external influences that challenge the students and ultimately affect their work. Bridges staff can make referrals to

necessary external services and can act as intermediaries between the students' families, the schools, and community resources.

### **Evidence of Success**

Two young men in the program began working with us while they were still in high school. They have finished school and now work at the institute. One man has worked at the institute for almost two years. This represents potential longevity in their positions that will benefit the institute. They are evaluated the same as other employees, and they identify and chart their progress and personal goals for job improvement as part of the institute's evaluation process. These men are helping us learn how to map out their tenure with the organization. They are challenged to do good work, and we are challenged to continually elevate their work assignments.

It is remarkable to see young people find their voice and advocate on their own behalf. For example, it is very gratifying to see them seek out human resources personnel to talk about job issues affecting them. As they mature, it is obvious to us that they will be good employees in any future work environment. Sometimes little things like seeing them in a crisp shirt and tie gives me a good feeling that they are growing as employees and as responsible people.

### **Expanding the Relationships**

Since bringing these men into the institute, I have become active in the Bridges Business Advisory Council and am currently the co-chair. This group exists to provide the program with employer perspectives. Our activities include providing feedback and technical expertise on making contact with businesses, providing mock interviews for students as they prepare for the job search, and promoting the program to other employers. We meet six times a year and participate in a number of other activities between meetings. For example, we have sponsored breakfast recruitment meetings to inform employers about the program and its potential benefits. We have also developed the Youth Experience Series (YES), which offers training sessions designed to give students skills in goal setting, résumé development, and other job success skills. Job shadowing experiences often accompany these sessions.

Ultimately, the members of the Business Advisory Council want to expand the impact of Bridges for both youth and employers. We are working to influence more companies to consider the benefits. It is often difficult to find a good match in hiring. It is important to find someone who has the appropriate skills, to keep them performing at a high level, to increase their skill level over time, and to make sure that burn-out does not occur so they remain productive members of the organization. We have been able to reach these goals in the institute's Fulfillment Center. Involving youth in our workplace through the competent and responsive help of programs like Bridges is a win-win situation.

*John McIlveen is the Director of Human Resources and Administration at the American Institute of Cancer Research in Washington, DC. He is also co-chair of the Business Advisory Council of the Washington, DC Bridges...From School to Work program of the Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities.*

### **Manufacturing & Production Technician Youth Apprentices: Generac Portable Products Corporation**

*by Bob Hurd*

Generac Portable Products Corporation, in Jefferson, WI, designs and produces portable generators and pressure washers. Since 1996, Generac has offered its manufacturing facility as a work site and classroom for youth apprentices. The Youth Apprenticeship (YA) program is operated under guidelines established by Wisconsin Governor's Work-Based Learning Board. Generac partners with the Jefferson County Consortium and the Watertown Unified School District to provide a unique and authentic learning environment for youth at-risk, including students with disabilities. Generac participates in this partnership as a way to build a qualified manufacturing workforce with a reinforced work ethic, to reduce the turnover of entry-level employees, and to attract employees to this rural area.

Using a state- and industry-approved manufacturing production curriculum, Generac has implemented a competency-driven YA program oriented toward manufacturing production and assembly. This one-year program provides opportunities for students with and without disabilities to participate in work-based learning experiences by integrating rigorous technical coursework with applied, hands-on activities related to manufacturing processes. Apprentices are rotated among about half of the plant's 14 departments. These work station rotations focus on skills such as blueprint reading, interpreting work instructions, using specific and common tools, welding, engineering, research and development, and tool repair. Apprentices spend approximately 30 hours in work and 6 hours in an academic/training program per week. An on-site instructor trained in special needs education provides an integrated English, science, math, and social studies curriculum. Generac pays the apprentices for a 40-hour work week, including workers' compensation. Apprentices also make visits to other work sites and are exposed to international suppliers who visit the workplace.

#### **Committed to Serving All Youth**

Generac hopes to assist all youth in making responsible transitions to the world of work and other adult roles. The Generac YA program serves youth at-risk for dropping out of high school due to academic or behavioral difficulties. While students with disabilities are not singled out for this program, many of the participants have had learning or behavioral disabilities. Generac is made aware of a student's disability prior to their starting work. Work and classroom accommodations are planned between the YA teacher and the employer prior to student employment. The YA program is managed by a job development firm, Opportunities, Inc., that provides counseling, home and site visits, and support services when necessary.

This YA program supports those students who learn best from "hands-on" and authentic work experiences. These are not students who can sit in a traditional classroom all day and learn. The program is competency-driven and is presented in an understandable context that combines the learning of specialized and general skills. Apprentices do not attend classes at their local high school during the apprenticeship, but rather, spend their day at the workplace. Academic instruction is provided at the work site by a special education teacher.

Generac takes a preventative approach to skill development, trying to catch the students before they experience job failure or develop poor job skills and behaviors. Adult co-workers and supervisors have high expectations of the apprentices for quality work and appropriate work behavior (i.e., attendance). Consequences for not meeting these expectations are similar to those set up for the adult workers. Apprentices are viewed as part of a team, and the ability to work as an effective team member is emphasized throughout the program. To successfully support youth at the work site, plant workers and work-site mentors must communicate these high expectations by developing interpersonal relationships with young workers and learning to appropriately reward and motivate them in the workplace.

#### **Lessons Learned**

Over the years, we have learned several lessons about the development of a youth apprenticeship program. First, employers must understand that students at-risk and/or with disabilities want to succeed and can be very good workers. In turn, many of these students are not typical and have personal issues that need to be, at times,

addressed by a trained professional. Thus it is helpful to have an on-site special education teacher, who can start slowly, with just a few students, to build on their successes. It is critical to emphasize the real-life expectations aspect of learning and working by treating the students as actual employees. It is also important to remember that we are not trying to change the world; we are trying to change the lives of a few kids a year. Generac has found that keeping the YA program to one year in duration helps to maintain the apprentices' interest and motivation.

Secondly, it is essential to have a leadership structure in place to facilitate communication between all the stakeholders (employers, school personnel, mentors, co-workers, students, and parents) from the program's start. It is a good idea to develop a handbook that outlines the company's and program's policies (i.e., student labor laws) should questions or concerns arise. This leadership structure can also serve to maintain student enrollment year-to-year. At Generac, in-service trainings are conducted so area teachers can visit the facilities to see how the program works, even for their most challenging students.

For this type of work-based learning program to succeed, employers must be committed long-term to both the students and the provision of resources (i.e., location, salaries, personnel, time). Generac provides the needed resources for program continuation, including use of the facility, student wages and workers' compensation, and 50% of the classroom instructor's salary. In particular, Generac has found it helpful to provide part of the classroom instructors' salary, because it gives us some leverage in defining the program.

### **Measuring Success**

Generac measures the success of its YA program in many ways. Students are returned to the community as high school graduates with the skills and experience to get a meaningful job in the manufacturing industry, and to be self-supporting. Apprentices receive a regular diploma, a Certificate of Occupational Proficiency in Manufacturing Production, and advanced credit standing in the University of Wisconsin System.

The apprentices have learned to act responsibly at work and in school and to produce high quality work. Many have proven themselves as capable individuals, having gained a significant amount of confidence and maturity. For example, over time they are willing to initiate conversations with their supervisors about complaints, suggestions, and work in general. The apprentices also have a positive effect on their adult co-workers. Generac employees take pride in the YA program and are glad to advise students.

Since 1996, Generac has graduated 34 apprentices (approximately six per year). Many of these graduates are offered full-time positions at Generac upon completion of the program. Some graduates have become mentors to new apprentices. Several graduates have gone on to postsecondary education in a related field. This community-based program is a creative solution to serving the needs of students with disabilities who are failing to succeed in the traditional school setting.

*Bob Hurd is a Business Area Manager responsible for the Generac Manufacturing Youth Apprenticeship Program. The program has been recognized regionally and nationally for its design and effectiveness. Generac's YA program received a national award from the Council for Exceptional Children and several commendations from the Governor of Wisconsin.*

### **Infrastructure for Success: Kentah Group, Inc.**

*by Keith Harris*

Kentah was founded in 1989 and is committed to being North America's premier provider of Information Technology (IT) infrastructure support solutions. The company is headquartered in Albuquerque, NM, with approximately 200 employees nationwide. Kentah's IT infrastructure support solutions include:

- Help desk management;
- Desktop support;
- Network and server management; and
- IT infrastructure projects and consulting.

Kentah's goal is to work with our clients as innovative, proactive collaborators, focused on reducing cost while being highly responsive to end-users' unique needs. Our mission is to deliver world class IT infrastructure support solutions to large organizations. We strive to continuously adapt to the needs of our clients, employees, and markets, while building bridges to meaningful employment for people with career barriers.

Kentah currently conducts business in North America with offices and operations in Sacramento, CA; Denver, CO; Atlanta, GA; Miami, FL; Chicago, IL; Washington DC; and Toronto, Canada.

We deliver our services in two ways: through managed services that provide ongoing operational support for help desk, desktop, and server environments; and through consulting services that address specific, project-based business needs of our clients, including end-user services, technology migrations and deployments, and project/program management. We deliver our solutions across multiple industries.

### **Success Through People and Diversity**

We have four sons, one who was born with Down syndrome. As the parents of a child with a disability, we have combined our passion for business with our passion to foster and create meaningful employment for persons with career barriers. We believe in the strength of all people. Workforce diversity is critical as our clients, suppliers, and partners are increasingly multicultural and global. Diverse perspectives increase our knowledge and are key to providing better and more creative business solutions. It is core to all areas of our business to foster an inclusive environment to attract, retain, and promote talented people from diverse backgrounds.

We hold as a corporate goal the creation of competitive job opportunities for candidates who possess one to two years' experience working in a computer-related environment performing tasks such as repair, diagnostics, or troubleshooting. Also, as representatives of Kentah, employees must have strong customer service skills.

When placement opportunities are identified, technical recruiters specializing in the IT arena can then recruit prospective applicants and recommend them to hiring managers. In addition, Kentah managers attempt to promote employees who display satisfactory performance, thereby retaining skilled IT professionals from diverse backgrounds, including persons with disabilities. This commitment is demonstrated by the desired outcome that all hiring initiated in a fiscal year should include a minimum of 33% who fall within workforce diversity guidelines, and that at least 5% of those should have a disability. Kentah has surpassed the original projection by 15%, achieving a 48% success rate.

Over the past three years, Kentah has hired five youths with disabilities who have served in summer employment positions. Kentah is optimistic that after graduating from high school, some of these individuals will remain in the IT field and return to work for Kentah.

In this same time period, Kentah hired six adults with disabilities who were primarily referred to us by the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). These staff members work in various locations throughout New Mexico. These staff members enjoyed success in their work endeavors, and the majority of them have also received promotions within their areas of expertise.

## **Our Drive to Help People with Disabilities Succeed at Kemtah**

From infancy, Kemtah has observed the essential guiding principle of respect and value for all people. Kemtah recognizes and appreciates the importance of productivity, self-sufficiency, and independence, and views the nearly 70% unemployment rate in the disabled community as a tremendous waste of human potential and resources. This important precept is at the foundation of every operational aspect of the company and is prominent in the disability emphasis of the company's Workforce Diversity Initiative. It is the company's view that if the United States is to remain competitive, every organization must embrace diversity, given its inherent competitive advantages. The only way to sustain prominent, meaningful reductions in the disabled jobless rate is to approach it as a sound business practice and not just an altruistic motive.

Although Kemtah has devoted much capital to the expansion of employment options for people with disabilities, it was not until 2001 that the company formally focused on workforce diversity. Our Workforce Diversity Initiative began in August 2001 with the establishment of an executive level office and the appointment of Jeannie Harris as vice president of workforce diversity. With this office as a driving force, Kemtah developed formal annual operational goals, procedures, and a five-year strategic blueprint to actively promote diversity throughout Kemtah.

## **Recruiting Avenues**

Kemtah works directly with the Department of Labor (DOL), the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), and business leadership networks on state, regional, and local levels to solicit job seekers who possess the required Kemtah skill sets in geographic locations where Kemtah has or anticipates a presence. Kemtah has enjoyed limited success utilizing electronic job boards that specifically target people with disabilities as well as other diverse candidates. An additional resource is the Governor's Committees on Disability and Employment Issues, which Kemtah accesses on a state-by-state basis. Recently, Kemtah began exploring the use of Employment Network providers, which were established via the Ticket to Work legislation. These recruiting avenues facilitate access to diverse populations and have the potential to yield a high degree of success in the future.

## **Our Lessons Learned**

Rather than relying solely on documentation provided by public agencies such as the DOL, DVR, a school district, or college, Kemtah discovered that it is essential to conduct its own independent skills assessment. In this way, Kemtah can tailor the assessment to the company's specific needs, as there is a significant difference between compulsory skills to fulfill the requirements of an outside entity and what the IT industry needs and expects.

For example, Kemtah has had great success with its A+ Certification preparation program geared toward high school students.\* This is a six- to eight-week course providing students, including those with disabilities, a point of entry into the IT profession. By concentrating on exposure to basic hardware and software components, this course supplies valuable theory as well as hands-on experience in diagnosing and repairing personal computers.

By limiting enrollment in the class to no more than 10 participants, the instructor is in a position to actively engage in a high level of individual attention, which has contributed to the success of this program. It is also important to point out that applicants are put through an extensive qualification and screening mechanism, which helps Kemtah ensure a good match between the students and the program. For instance, Kemtah selects 10 promising individuals from more than 50 applicants for each session. In Kemtah's experience, about 40% of the participants achieve certification and go on to work in the IT field.

## **Students Benefit from Early Exposure to Work**

Involving the private sector early in the transition process can help students gain a realistic view of the workplace and work expectations. This exposure aids in the students' ability to be successful on the job. Kemtah wants to be involved in the transition preparation process as early as possible, thus providing students the opportunity to engage in a transitional vehicle and develop a more realistic view of their skills and interests. By participating in

\*Editor's note: A+ Certification is sponsored by the Computer Technology Industry Association to certify the competency of entry-level computer service technicians.

this progression, students get exposure to the real world of work and are prepared for success at Kentah.

Upon entering the IT field, students bring a knowledge of IT theory and practical, relevant experience to their chosen fields of study, plus an understanding of Kentah's operational philosophy and a strong work ethic.

### **Employability Skills are the Key to Success**

Kentah believes that there is a need for greater dialog between a student's educational environment and the student's future occupational environment. Therefore, schools need to teach students appropriate communication and interpersonal skills as such skills are crucial to success on any job. Skills students need to possess in order to excel in our workplace include:

- Being able to interact effectively with customers, as well as with co-workers;
- Being able to express themselves with clarity in written and oral form;
- Being able to accurately calculate math equations;
- Having a more in-depth understanding of both applications and the advantages a computer can provide; and
- Engaging in critical-thinking activities.

Kentah can guide any employee to perform a job if the employee already possesses a strong work ethic, maintains a high level of responsibility, and has sound communication skills. Therefore, Kentah recommends that schools and programs with an emphasis on employment objectives for youth workers who have disabilities place more prominence on these employability skills.

*Keith A. Harris is the founder, Chairman of the Board, and Chief Executive Officer of Kentah.*



## **Quality Products, Quality Employees: Medtronic Physio-Control** *by LaDrene Coyne*

Our mission at Medtronic Physio-Control is to make tools for lifesaving teams. We develop, manufacture, sell, and service the renowned LIFEPAK® defibrillator/monitors and automated external defibrillators (AEDs). Our products are used to save lives and to build “heart-safe communities.” We are based in Redmond, WA, but our products are sold and serviced throughout the world. It is not a responsibility that we take lightly, and we must recruit and maintain a quality workforce that also takes this responsibility seriously. When we were first approached in the mid-1980s by a program representing job seekers with developmental disabilities, we needed assurances that prospective employees from this program would meet our high expectations.

### **The Beginning of a Long Partnership**

In the mid-1980s Medtronic Physio-Control was experiencing rapid growth and the expansion of its manufacturing concerns. Finding good, reliable workers was a significant need. At about the same time, Trillium Employment Services, a local organization that represents job seekers with disabilities, began to pioneer a process called supported employment. Many of the people it represents require coaching and considerable assistance in learning job tasks once they are on the job. Supported employment enables people needing this extensive coaching to succeed in the workplace.

Knowing that Medtronic Physio-Control was a progressive company, Trillium approached our CEO about developing a partnership that would enable us to fill some of our production needs and that would enable Trillium job seekers to enter the workforce for the first time. Some of the individuals had been in work training centers called sheltered workshops, where all of the trainees had disabilities. Some people came from public school special education programs.

Our CEO directed the vice president of manufacturing to examine how a partnership might be implemented. A line supervisor was identified, and a centralized place was established where several Trillium workers could work together in a distinct enclave. Workers focused on narrowly defined tasks and were supervised by Trillium staff. In fact, a contract paid Trillium for this work, and Trillium paid the enclave workers from this contract.

Eventually Medtronic Physio-Control and Trillium realized that the people hired through supported employment could be taught to work in other departments on our production floor. Supervisors and co-workers could also be taught how to directly coach the Trillium workers, minimizing the need for Trillium job coaches. As a result, eventually the workers in the enclave were mainstreamed throughout the plant and converted to direct-hire status.

### **Help Needed on the Line**

When the partnership began, I was a line supervisor overseeing a pace line in the board shop. The line hand-stuffed components into PCBs, and there was a need for an additional headcount. This provided an opportunity for moving a qualified person from the enclave line into the pace line area.

This was a new experience for me, but with the Trillium staff working closely with me to organize the work assignments for the individual, I became an advocate. Trillium provided training for the co-workers and myself. We were taught how to introduce new tasks to the individual, how to prompt the person to complete the tasks, and how to deal with occasional production or work behavior issues. The individual learned the job so well that I was eventually called upon to help other teams integrate supported employees into their production lines. I helped organize and conduct training sessions for team members when the workers were first introduced to a new team. Through this process I have developed a strong ongoing relationship with Trillium.

There are eight people with developmental disabilities working in our plant today, earning from \$15,189 to \$24,500 annually. All receive full benefits including health insurance and four weeks’ annual vacation.

### **What Makes the Partnership Work?**

The partnership with Trillium has evolved over the years to what I consider a very strong and sophisticated

example of the benefits in a truly reciprocal relationship. Trillium has a receptive business to which it can refer potential job seekers, and we have a referral source that knows our company and our job requirements inside out. The evolution and success of the relationship is the result of four key elements:

- Designated points of contact: Our relationship has always featured designated Trillium contacts and a designated internal company contact who work in tandem.
- Co-worker training: Formal training sessions are provided for co-workers and supervisors when they are first introduced to the prospect of working with an employee engaged in supported employment. The sessions include possible scenarios relating to what to expect and general information about disability awareness, accommodations, and etiquette.
- Integrating this relationship into regular hiring and training practices: We believe it important that our partnership with Trillium be a part of the company culture rather than a separate or special program. The screening, hiring, and training of each team member are in compliance with company procedures. If specific individual accommodations are necessary, we work with Trillium and our tooling shop.
- Careful screening: The reason our partnership has worked so well is because of the careful screening process we have developed to match applicants with jobs. Trillium is an integral part of the screening, because they know both the applicants and our operation so well. Occasionally, we have had a new person spend a few hours a day for a week to see if it is a good job match before a hiring decision is made. The lengthy job tenure of most our team members with developmental disabilities is a testament to both the careful screening process and the commitment of Trillium's expertise.

### **Pioneering Spirit**

Nearly 40 years ago, we introduced a medical device that launched an industry—the first commercial DC defibrillator. Since then, our product focus has been on the development of the highest quality medical devices for prediction or urgent treatment of cardiac and respiratory emergencies. Our early involvement with Trillium to include supported employees in our workforce fits with our legacy of “firsts.” We introduce and distribute cutting edge, lifesaving products, and we adopt and incorporate human resource and development practices that keep us on the cutting edge.

Recently, I was assigned to be a loaned executive to chair the Washington State Business Leadership Network (BLN), a network of employers who educate and support businesses to hire, retain, and improve customer service for people with disabilities. This assignment represents a recognition and commitment that our company can offer more to the larger business community about how well this has worked for Medtronic Physio-Control. Over the years I have gained invaluable information about supported employment in the workplace, and I am pleased to apply my knowledge as I work with the Business Leadership Network to help other companies learn about recruiting and managing workers with developmental disabilities.

The mission of my position is to educate and support Medtronic and other businesses to recruit, hire, and retain people with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act represents civil rights for people with disabilities (however, it doesn't legislate attitudes!). Business representatives talking with peers about positive experiences will change attitudes. I will utilize our experience at Medtronic Physio-Control to assist other businesses and Medtronic to hire people with disabilities.

*LaDrene Coyne is a former Senior Production Supervisor at Medtronic Physio-Control, where she has worked for the past 21 years. She is currently a loaned executive, assigned by Medtronic Physio-Control, to the Washington State Business Leadership Network to work to expand her company's initiatives to hire people with developmental disabilities.*

## **Searching for a Reliable Workforce: Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center**

*by J. Erin Rieble*

Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center is dedicated to serving the health care needs of infants, children, and adolescents and to providing research and teaching programs that ensure delivery of the highest quality pediatric care to our community, the nation, and the world.

### **High Quality Care Requires High Quality Staff**

In a typical hospital, 70% of the staff members are professionals such as doctors, nurses, therapists, and other personnel who are highly trained and educated. For the most part, the rest are support staff who receive the greater portion of their training on the job. At all levels, however, hospitals need people who are committed and well prepared. Hospitals also need to connect directly with their communities, both as healthcare providers and as employers. Therefore, beginning in the mid-1990s, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center began a significant diversity initiative to attract and retain the entire spectrum of the community's potential workforce. This initiative especially targeted people with disabilities. The reasons were three-fold:

- We were experiencing a particular problem attracting and keeping good entry-level support staff. We needed to upgrade and expand our recruitment approaches to include the large segment of job seekers who have disabilities, want to work, and, as we learned, who are often represented by a variety of organizations that assist them in job preparation and job search.
- We needed to bolster the quality and intensiveness of our on-the-job education of new staff so that they were prepared well, performed better, and stayed on the job longer. Some of these employment organizations offered assistance to the hospital in designing ways of improving job training and support for people with disabilities.
- We had adopted as a guiding principle a 1995 policy of the American College of Healthcare Executives, which states: "Healthcare organizations must lead their communities in increasing employment opportunities for qualified persons with disabilities and advocate on behalf of their employment to other organizations."

As we quickly learned, hospitals can be very good at providing medical services to people with disabilities who are in their care, but they are not always so good at recognizing the productivity that is possible for people with disabilities when they have the right kinds of opportunity and support. We had to take some baby steps before we were able to develop what is now a well-designed partnership with outside schools and organizations that enabled us to eventually hire more than 100 people with disabilities in a wide range of jobs.

### **Search for Assistance Begins**

As the head of the hospital's Emergency Room in the mid-1990s with hiring and firing authority, I decided to look into this recruitment avenue. Not knowing exactly where to start, I used the phone book to locate such resources. After a few dead ends, I found the Great Oaks Institute of Technology and Career Development, a special needs vocational school, and the Hamilton County Board of MR/DD, a government agency serving people with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities. After many planning meetings, we initiated a training experience where youth and adults with disabilities were taught to stock supplies for the Emergency Room.

The arrangement worked so well that other departments wanted to try a similar approach. We soon identified another area of opportunity—the hospital needed reliable couriers to deliver mail, packages, and materials to labs and locations throughout our nine-building campus. Before long, 13 people were hired as lab couriers. We formalized the relationship with Great Oaks and the Board of MR/DD with a legal contract specifying the roles of all partners, and I soon found myself out of the ER and directing this new effort, now known as Project SEARCH.

### **Experience Leads to Adjustments in our Approach**

The initiative worked so well that we decided to significantly expand it. We put out a call to a number of agencies that serve job seekers with disabilities, resulting eventually in the involvement of six different agencies that provided a total of 13 different job coaches at any given time. Unfortunately, this turned out to be a very unwieldy—and ultimately unworkable—arrangement. We found ourselves dealing with multiple organizations whose staff had little direct knowledge of our needs. We had to train them *and* the employees with disabilities. We also had no control over who was hired to be a job coach (and if they were late or tardy, we were at their mercy). If they were not of the caliber we desired, we had little influence over improving their selection, training, or development. Overall, this was not a very employer-friendly arrangement.

So we changed the model. Through a contract with Hamilton County Board of MR/DD, we now hire our own job coaches. We have developed our own support program for individuals with disabilities whom we hire. In this way we can make sure that the performance of both the coaches and the employees meets our standards. The job coaches become thoroughly acquainted with the hospital's needs, and consequently are better able to train and support the people with disabilities we hire. And we can more rapidly and conveniently address any performance or accommodation issues that may arise.

We have made Project SEARCH a single point of entry, so that it is easier for us to make contacts with schools and agencies representing people with disabilities. We coordinate referrals, the application process, all hiring decisions, and manage on-the-job support, such as job coaching, adaptations, accommodations, final task definitions for specific jobs, and travel training. We also maintain employment status through on-site follow-along service and provide opportunities for career advancement. Project SEARCH now provides employment and educational opportunities for more than 75 individuals with disabilities who have a range of disabilities and accommodation needs. They are employed in a range of positions, with almost all of the positions at full-time status.

### **Project SEARCH Targets Youth**

Participants in Project SEARCH learn through demonstration, outreach, and education, combined with technical assistance, in several distinct programs. One of these programs is called the High School Transition Program, now in its sixth year of operation. This program offers a one-year transition program for students with disabilities who are in their last year of school. The program is geared toward students whose main goal is employment and who are interested in career exploration in a healthcare setting. It is a major vehicle for preparing and recruiting new hospital employees, although a number of the participants go on to work in other places.

During the first half of the school year, up to 12 students spend the day at Cincinnati Children's or at Clinton Memorial Hospital and rotate through three to four work site experiences. These site rotations allow participants to build various skills, including communication, problem solving, and specific job duties as they become ready for competitive work environments. During the second half of the school year, individualized job development and placement occurs based on the student's experiences, strengths, and skills. Students are given support with accommodations, adaptations, and on-the-job coaching by on-site staff. As the school year ends, linkages are made to appropriate community services in order to ensure a successful transition to work as well as retention and career advancement. Many stay on and become permanent employees of Cincinnati Children's.

### **What Makes it Work**

In the past, our human resources department was typically approached by many different education and job placement professionals. We had no way of understanding all the organizations and people they represented. It also seemed that the approaches they used were based on sympathy, so that we would consider hiring a person with a disability. It is not a model that works for business. It is too complicated and confusing, too inconvenient, and too out-of-touch with our real human-resource needs. Most often, applications from such sources ended up in the circular file. We have been able to develop a viable alternative that is very effective in meeting our needs. The keys to making it work to our benefit are:

- There is a single point of entry (Project SEARCH). We post jobs and make them known to schools and organizations representing people with disabilities who access one place for job information and through which the various hospital departments can screen applicants.
- Our internal position in the hospital allows us to constantly evaluate job opportunities and determine options, such as job restructuring, that meet our needs and that also offer unique opportunities for job seekers.
- On-site staff, employed by the hospital, facilitate direct coaching and the support necessary for many of our employees with disabilities to perform well.
- A clear cooperative agreement with selected school and disability service partners gives us a direct connection with special educators and rehabilitation professionals for expertise in accommodations and training methodology when we need it. We no longer have to use the phone book to find resources for expertise in disabilities and employment.
- We strongly believe in the policy statement of the American College of Healthcare Executives on increasing employment of people with disabilities. Our approach creates internal advocates for disability employment.

Our project, which has received local and national awards, has now expanded beyond our own hospital complex. In addition to linking our efforts with other healthcare facilities, we are now negotiating with a prominent bank and two retail stores to organize similar opportunities for people with disabilities. Every industry has the need for a well prepared, highly functioning workforce. We want to equip companies in other industries to develop internal structures that will enable them to successfully recruit, hire, and manage employees with disabilities. Our experience with an employer-driven approach clearly illustrates very effective ways to both meet company human-resource needs and to increase the employment options for people with disabilities.

*J. Erin Riehle, M.S.N., R.N., is Director of the Division of Disability Services at the Convalescent Hospital for Children, an affiliate of Cincinnati Children's Medical Center. A long-time healthcare professional and former Emergency Room administrator, she founded Project SEARCH. Project SEARCH and the Division of Disability Services at Cincinnati Children's now encompass eight programs, including the High School Transition Program, Adult Employment Program, Healthcare Training Program, Vocational-Education Clinic, Intern Program, Virtual Academy, Incumbent Worker Program, and SEARCH for Fitness. For additional information, go to <http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/ps/>.*

### **Keeping Stock of Personnel Needs: Safeway**

*by Grace Louie*

Safeway is one of the largest food and drug retailers in North America. At year-end 2000, the company operated 1,688 stores in the western, southwestern, Rocky Mountain, and Mid-Atlantic regions of the United States and in western Canada. In support of its stores, Safeway has an extensive network of distribution, manufacturing, and food processing facilities.

#### **Safeway and Diversity**

Safeway has many training and development programs in place that can help our employees establish successful careers in the grocery industry. From new-hire orientation to our Retail Leadership Development program and other programs that provide training from specific job duties to leadership and supervisory skills, we pride ourselves on strengthening our workforce and giving all of our employees the opportunity for advancement. Our strong belief in the value of diversity provides a firm foundation for our long-standing commitment to equal opportunity employment. Safeway does not view equal employment opportunity as “hiring a person with a disability.” We are a very diverse company and an equal opportunity employer. The important thing is: Can you get the job done?

My first exposure to people with disabilities was when I first became a Safeway store manager back in 1993. There was a regular customer who worked with young people with disabilities. Over time, we got to know each other. She put me in touch with an organization that worked with people with disabilities and the relationship began.

The first agency I worked with was The Arc. This gave me the opportunity to locate and interview students who could be successful in the workplace, whom I may not have otherwise encountered. I learned of the *Bridges...From School to Work* program shortly after this and have been getting a supply of excellent labor because of this organization’s reputation and the caliber of young people who participate.

When I was transferred to another Safeway store in 1999, I was having difficulty hiring qualified and responsible employees. I sought out Bridges as a resource for potential hires. This proved to be a fruitful collaboration. I have also collaborated with The Arc as a resource for referrals. Because of my positive experience hiring youth with disabilities through the support of these agencies, I want to take advantage of this hiring avenue to find qualified referrals for Safeway.

#### **Open Access for Students With Disabilities at Safeway**

At the Diamond Heights Safeway, currently 10 youth with disabilities are employed who receive training and full wages. Over the years I have hired 13 youth with disabilities, three of whom continue to be long-standing employees. I do not want these individuals to be treated differently, but I do tend to pay more attention to whether they need support with new tasks. It is important to set these young people up for success and provide supports wherever possible without compromising hiring practices or employment expectations. As a result, as part of the hiring process, I have allowed agency staff who serve these individuals to sit in on the interview. In addition to entry-level work opportunities, we also provide a wide range of training events:

- Students attend detailed and informative store tours and a safety lecture;
- Students are enrolled with the clerks’ union;
- Students attend customer-service lectures; and
- Students attend in-store orientations.

Generally, disabilities are not discussed as an issue with co-workers. The expectation is that people adjust and learn to work with diverse groups of people. If there is a situation that arises, and an employee is having difficulty adjusting, we will bring in agency support, provide staff with a general sense of the situation without specifics, and ask for staff assistance to help make the student’s transition more successful.

I have designated some front-line staff and supervisors who are aware of some of the special support needs that

some students may have. I try to encourage my supervisors to be patient with the student workers. In addition to specific skill training, students learn and establish strong customer relations and effective employee behaviors that are necessary for success as an entry-level worker. I try to recognize each student's abilities and potential and work with them at their pace. We try to make students feel comfortable and understand the job responsibility and the perks that go along with employment, such as money and benefits. I have found that the students with disabilities I have hired learn responsibility and accountability. Our successful partnership with Bridges works well for everyone involved.

### **Support Strategies and Success**

We have a good working relationship with the employer representatives from Bridges and the support staff from The Arc. It is very important for representatives to develop relationships and a level of trust with companies. For example, it is important that employees are prescreened and prepped for job expectations and the hiring process, which includes interviews, orientation, and training. Employees must be capable. Agency staff play an active role in recommending candidates for work. They assist these potential employees with acquiring the knowledge to perform well and maintain employment. The agency contact needs to know what the job entails and provide extra coaching as necessary. This includes assisting with explanations, reinforcement, and follow-through regarding policies and procedures such as attendance, absences, etc.

For safety issues and accountability, it helps to have open lines of communication with counselors and parents. To make the job a success, we need dedication from the employee, the employer representative, and our staff. For example, there is a young man who has worked at the store for the past two years. His Bridges employer representative proactively approached Safeway before he started the job to identify his job tasks and responsibilities. This helped make a match between his interests and our needs. He now works in the bread department, stocking shelves and removing unsold bread. He uses a computerized pricing system. His responsibilities are expanding, and he will eventually be accountable for the bread department "sell-through"—the sales increase and decrease. With patience and perseverance, he, his supervisor, and co-workers have achieved a successful and productive team effort.

We place importance on job retention. When we encounter difficulties with an individual, we try to involve the counselor in order to resolve the issue and to avoid termination. When employees do not adhere to policies, this requires close contact with agencies and enforcement of normal consequences associated with such actions. We try very hard to work with people without jeopardizing the integrity of the company.

This experience has made me much more open to considering potential employees with disabilities who are not involved in Bridges or The Arc programs. As long as there is a support person available, there is no reason these individuals cannot be successful. A support person does not necessarily need to come from an agency that focuses on job support, but can be a counselor involved in other areas of the person's life who also assists with job placement issues. It could be a parent or even a "house mother." The important factor is that the employer have a support network available as a resource for helping the young person succeed on the job.

Most of all, we ask that the agency representative send us people who want to work and want to do a good job with minimal supervision once they are acclimated. We give proactive suggestions, and we appreciate involvement from the employer representative. Having the support agency involved makes our job a lot easier.

*Grace Louie has been Store Manager for the Diamond Heights Safeway in San Francisco, CA, since 1999. She has worked for Safeway for the past 24 years. For her initiative to hire, train, and supervise successful work experiences for youth with disabilities, Safeway received the 2001 Employer of the Year Award from the Marriott Foundation Bridges... From School to Work program.*

### **Brokering Achievement: Old Colony Insurance Service, Inc.** *by S. Brooks May, Jr.*

Old Colony Insurance Service, Inc. is one of the leading insurance brokers in the southeast United States with offices in Crestwood and Lexington, KY. In addition, we have an affiliated company, Cromwell Insurance, in Lexington. Old Colony is built on a foundation of integrity and excellent service to its customers.

Old Colony was founded in 1975. We have grown to be one of the largest independent insurance brokers in northern Kentucky and southern Indiana through our products and services. Although the organization was founded on property insurance and casualty and employee benefits, today Old Colony offers a full range of insurance products to its policyholders. Old Colony has 66 employees in its two locations.

#### **Addressing Our Need**

We receive a large volume of incoming mail and have had trouble keeping someone long-term in our mail room. The turnover in the mail room required time and money for recruiting and retraining. One day it occurred to me to try hiring someone with a disability for the position. I had a good friend who had Down's syndrome and a niece with severe mental retardation, and had been around individuals with disabilities for a long time. Hiring someone with a disability would allow us the opportunity to help someone else while at the same time addressing our long-term mail room needs.

Through my church I knew a special education teacher, Octa Kellond. She suggested that Lindsay might be a good match for the mail room position. I knew Lindsay and her family through church as well. We made the connection, and Lindsay started working for us.

Lindsay worked in the mail room in the mornings while she was in high school through a cooperative work arrangement. We did not create a new position for her. She filled an existing, open position in the mail room. She performs the same tasks that the position has always required—primarily opening and distributing mail as well as distributing supplies throughout our Crestwood office.

#### **Lindsay's Job**

Lindsay opens, date-stamps, and distributes the mail to individuals in the office. She has learned how to use the computer and goes into our customer database to identify who handles particular customer accounts. She checks, refills, and maintains the paper supply for the copier, printer, and fax machines. She also attends to other supply issues. The staff sends her e-mail requests for supplies, which she retrieves and delivers. She works weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. When Lindsay arrives at work she immediately goes with a co-worker to the post office to pick up the mail. When she returns with the mail, she opens it with a mechanical letter opener and proceeds from there. She is always looking for something to do. When she is finished with her work and has a few minutes left, she will come around and ask if anyone needs anything.

Because of the volume of incoming mail, it takes her a long time to open all the mail. We allow her as much time as she needs; there is no pressure. We have adjusted our workflow somewhat to accommodate her pace. If we had hired someone else, he or she might be faster. Having worked for us for the past three years, Lindsay is conscientious and dedicated. We do not have the turnover in the mail room as in the past.

#### **Initial Support Made the Difference**

Lindsay's job coach, Ms. Kellond, was an instrumental part of making Lindsay's job a success. She played an indispensable role in training and job acclimation, working with Lindsay and our staff every day to make sure Lindsay knew and understood job expectations. She also helped us learn to communicate and convey tasks effectively.

Ms. Kellond divided the job into steps and made sure Lindsay knew how to do each one. She identified and recorded the flow of tasks and trained Lindsay on each part of the job. Lindsay has handwritten notes on the steps to do her job and refers to her notes when she gets off task. When needed, she is reminded to use her notes and that helps her to refocus on the work at hand.



Ms. Kellond worked with her for approximately three or four months. Lindsay is now very self-sufficient and works independently. She has a supervisor who has daily contact with her and checks in to see how everything is going. While Lindsay was still in school, Ms. Kellond provided the initial support. We now address any issues on our own. Lindsay also has an extremely supportive family that we can also contact if necessary.

### **How We Made it Work**

Having Lindsay work at Old Colony has been a gradual learning process for all of us. The main lesson that we have learned is that Lindsay, like other employees, has her own interests, skills, and personality. As we have become more acquainted with her, we have learned how to work effectively together.

At times, Lindsay has some difficulty with appropriate social skills and interactions with other people, which can lead to occasional misunderstandings that need clarification. Lindsay is extremely conscientious and takes what we say literally. We have also learned that we need to be careful about teasing and joking and make it clear that we were teasing before we leave the conversation, so that she is not confused or her feelings do not get hurt. Once when the owner jokingly told her as he was leaving, “Okay, you’re in charge while I’m gone.” She took that to heart and told a few of the staff she was going to tell on them if they did not perform. We address these issues as they arise just as we would with any employee.

We have learned that Lindsay is just like any other young adult, who at times may be focused on the job and at other times is not so focused. We have talked with her about needing to stay on task. When she gets off task she is reminded to refer to her notes and is able to get back on task quickly.

Some of the strategies that have helped us to work effectively with Lindsay include:

- Getting to know her and her likes and dislikes;
- Becoming familiar with what she can do and what she needs help with;
- Having the same expectations for her as for other employees;
- Treating her with the same respect as other employees;
- Providing initial training from her job coach;
- Maintaining daily check-ins from her supervisor; and
- Supporting her use of written job tasks with steps to follow for a reminder when she needs it.

### **A Win-Win Situation for All**

Lindsay definitely feels like a part of the office. She is dedicated, very conscientious, and tries hard to do her job well. We enjoy having her as an employee. She has now worked for us for three years.

The staff has been very gracious and accepting of her. Working with Lindsay has been a learning process for all of us. At times we are caught off guard by her response to certain situations, but we adjust, address the situation at hand, and move on. She attends all social functions and employee meetings. If her mother is unable to pick her up after work, a co-worker will drive her home. She brings and eats her lunch daily in the break room with everyone else. Now everyone here understands Lindsay and accepts her for who she is. Having Lindsay as one of our employees has really been a good experience for everyone. Lindsay recently said to the co-worker who goes with her to get the mail that she wanted to “be here forever.” That would work for us.

*S. Brooks May, Jr. is Chief Operating Officer and Chief Financial Officer for Old Colony Insurance Service and Cromwell Insurance Agency. He is responsible for all operating divisions as well as all financial aspects of the businesses. He also oversees the personal lines, operating, and marketing departments for the agencies and currently is serving on The Travelers Insurance Companies Agents Advisory Council for personal lines.*



## **SUMMARY & CONCLUSION**

The following paragraphs summarize the authors' main points, which could serve as important lessons for the fields of transition and workforce development, especially in relation to the development of relationships with employers.

### **Why Employers Host Youth**

Several factors motivated this sample of employers to create work-based learning opportunities for youth with disabilities. These factors ranged from chance encounters with school or workforce programs to proactive and sophisticated efforts to recruit and screen youth. Several employers indicated more than one factor that influenced their participation with youth transition and workforce development programs. These include:

- Meeting a perceived community need (NASA, Kemtah, Microsoft);
- Meeting an ongoing industry need (NASA, Microsoft, Generac, Safeway, Cincinnati Children's);
- Meeting a company-specific need (Generac, MacWorld magazine, Kemtah, Port Discovery, Safeway, Cincinnati Children's, Old Colony Insurance); and
- Encounters with specific individuals representing youth (Macworld, American Cancer Research Institute, Safeway, Old Colony Insurance).

### **What Made it Work for Employers**

Some common themes were expressed by the employers:

- It is essential that employers work with competent professionals and organizations to link them with youth, assist with matching the youth to assignments in the company, ensure effective accommodations, and provide follow-up to the youth and the company. Without these intermediary links, their ability to offer work experiences for youth with disabilities would not be possible.
- Whether the employers' motivation for inviting youth into the workplace was to meet a company, industry, or community need, employers provide work experiences to youth because they benefit in some way.
- Internal champions often arise within companies that make work experiences beneficial for both youth and the company.
- Providing work experiences is often a no-risk way for employers to screen potential new employees.
- Some companies see work experiences for youth with disabilities as one aspect of a larger diversity initiative.
- Disability awareness and training, either formal or informal, for the youth's co-workers is integral to the success of most work experiences.
- Most employers prefer to follow typical human-resource procedures when bringing youth with disabilities into the workplace, but they are willing and able to make extensive accommodations and adaptations to procedures when they have competent help from disability professionals.
- Work experience options can be expanded when employers and youth programs share resources and sometimes costs.

### **What it Means for the Field**

The following items are a few recommendations—sometimes implied, sometimes directly stated—that these employers suggest for practitioners.

- To recruit companies for work experiences, market the competent service of the professional or organization representing youth with disabilities and the potential benefits to the company. Avoid charitable appeals based on disability.
- Get to know the industries and companies in your area; careful screening and matching are not possible without this knowledge.
- Seek out and cultivate internal champions who can advance the concept and the value of such work experiences within companies.
- Be ready to provide both formal and informal disability awareness training, tailored to the needs and circumstances of the company.
- Make the processes for establishing work experiences as straightforward and as uncomplicated as possible.
- Organize continued follow-up services for the company; that is, provide service to both the employer and the youth.

In the long run, it is important to continue to seek out and listen to the voices of employers. What they expressed in this collection of essays is that neither disability nor youth necessarily dissuade employers from hosting work experiences. With improved focus on the employer's needs, there is good reason to expect improved adult employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. Ultimately, if one of the most important activities of transition and youth development programs is to help youth with disabilities enter the workplace, then it is essential for stakeholders to understand and address the circumstances of those who might provide these opportunities.









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